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Project Fresh Start

Good morning members of the House Judiciary Committee, thank you for the opportunity to give my testimony. My name is Chance Jackson and I am an intern of Project Fresh Start, City of New Haven, Prison Reentry Initiative. Project Fresh Start works with community partners, state agencies, and other re-entry stakeholders to support the re-integration of formerly incarcerated residents into the New Haven community.

I am writing this testimony in order to support bill **H.B Bill 5641**. The proposed bill will make important reforms to the pardon process. One of the most significant reforms associated with this bill is that it would provide an intermediary step in allowing individuals the opportunity to receive a "Provisional Pardon" versus a "Certificate of Employability." The significance of adding an additional avenue to the current pardon system would be revolutionary. This would allow petitioners the opportunity to properly procure employment, while at the same time, create a standard in hope of one day being expunged.

Project Fresh Start provides information and advocacy to hundreds of individuals with criminal records each year who seek assistance overcoming the barriers they face in obtaining lawful employment, affordable housing, and other measures to assist them in their acclimation back into the community and their efforts to become productive citizens. Moreover, we help individuals compile

pardon applications and conduct trainings on the pardon system in Connecticut. We currently work with an average of about 65 clients per month with the pardon process. Based on this work, I concluded that this bill would help to remedy several deficiencies in Connecticut's current pardon system. Furthermore, this would pioneer one of the most functionally innovative pardon systems in the United States.

The reforms proposed in bill **H.B Bill 5641** will have a great effect on the re-entry community and also help to lower recidivism rates in Connecticut. People who have been convicted of a felony or misdemeanor in Connecticut are placed into a pool of burden and barrier. Re-entrants face extremely difficult times when applying for employment given the discretionary freedoms of the employer. It has become harder and harder for ex-offenders to shake the shackles of confinement post-release. In every judiciary system, there are laws that are designed to prohibit, discriminate, and impede on ex-offenders from actively progressing back into society. These hindrances include, but are not limited to: employment, housing, licensures, and volunteering. While some crimes require restrictions for public safety and public awareness, non-violent crimes should not foster such collateral consequences. Marginalizing people for minor offenses only further heightens an already penal system. In a letter written by Margaret Love and April Frazier it states, "even where there is no legal basis for disqualification, and even where jurisdictions have adopted a policy of encouraging re-integration for offenders, employers and others who control access to opportunities and benefits still hesitate to give this population a second chance." As currently implemented, there is only an "Expungement Pardon" and a "Certificate of Employability" which means re-entrants either qualify for a full expungement or have to settle with a certificate, which ideally deems one employable in Connecticut. According to research conducted by the Project Fresh Start, in conjunction with the Yale YUPP-Society, several employers and community partners have concluded that a "Certificate of Employability" is NOT useful when it comes to employment. Most employers are unsure of the

purpose of this certificate while others are unfamiliar with it; therefore, re-entrants continue to be denied for employment due to collateral consequences of past criminal conviction.

By sealing the criminal record from employers, re-entrants would have a fighting chance when it comes to procuring employment. One of the underling goals of Project Fresh Start is to provide assistance to past offenders in hopes of returning to productive, law-abiding lives. Most clients who return home from incarceration face a number of major obstacles including employment and housing. The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) has already begun to recognize these barriers and the impact they have on recidivism, given the research showing that formerly incarcerated individuals who cannot find stable housing are more likely to recidivate; therefore, if we better assist re-entrants back into a working society, we can help to diminish rates of recidivism and increase the number of productive individuals within Connecticut.

By sealing criminal records from potential employers, this bill would help to construct a more functional pardon system that will provide the re-entry population with the second chance of becoming meaningful, working citizens.

I, Chance Jackson, endorse the bill **H.B Bill 5641**.

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